



Large Jail Network Bulletin

Why Aren't There More Jail Industry Programs?

Overcoming the Obstacles

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One of the challenges that well-managed institutions face is the need to keep inmates productively occupied. Achieving productive inmate activity reduces the idleness that often causes boredom, discontent, and frustration-any of which may, in turn, result in disciplinary problems.

One way to keep inmates engaged is through jail industry programs in which inmates work in factory-like settings inside correctional facilities. Because there are usually fewer jobs than inmates to fill them, competition for these scarce jobs may also tend to encourage continued good behavior so that an inmate may qualify for them.

Moreover, if our goal is to prepare inmates for successful reintegration into the community, they must learn how to work to enable them to make a smoother transition to the real world of work. Productive inmates can learn also good work habits that may help keep them out of jail in the future.

Another benefit of an industry program is that it can generate funds to help offset the costs of incarceration. Industries can also manufacture some of the items currently purchased from others, resulting in cost savings, shorter delivery times, savings of shipping charges, and the flexibility to provide custom services that might not otherwise be available.

Industry programs are also good public relations. People like to see inmates working and are more likely to be impressed with a facility in which inmates are working than with one where they are hanging around.

Recently I have noticed many references to the advantages of industry programs, including the indication that inmates who have been involved in industry programs while incarcerated tend to do better after they are released than those who did not participate.

If jail industry programs are so beneficial, why aren't more jails involved? I believe that it is the fear of the unknown that inhibits those who might be interested in developing industry programs for their institutions.

Some of their fears are:

- What if an inmate gets hurt on the job?
- What if an inmate stabs someone with a tool?
- What if we get sued?

Certainly these are valid concerns which must be considered, but they should not prevent an institution from considering an industry program without objectively evaluating its possibilities.

Jails are experts at security but not necessarily at running a business with inmates as the workers. Can the two mix? It is my hope that, after reading this article, you will agree that they can.

If jail industry programs are so beneficial, why aren't more jails involved?

If you are considering an industry program, you are not alone. For the past decade programs have been successfully operating within institutions similar to yours. I would like to share my ten years' experience with York Street Industries, the correctional industry program of the Hampden County Sheriff's Depart-

ment, with the hope that it might be helpful to you. There are other programs with similar track records that could also share how they have addressed the following key issues.

Inmates with Tools

Most administrators fear that if you give inmates tools, they will kill or maim each other, harm staff, or at least smuggle the tools back to their living units. In fact, this is the most important security issue related to jail industries and it *must* be handled properly.

- Tools should be put on shadow boards, behind locked doors in a secure area, to make it readily apparent when a tool is out of place.
- There must be a very tightly controlled inventory and sign-out system so the tools are accounted for at all times.
- No inmate movement in or out of the work area should be permitted until all tools are accounted for and secured at the end of the work period.
- Metal detectors, pat searches, strip searches, and spot cell checks should be used.
- Finally, there should be a zero tolerance policy for any hint of inmate aggression in the industry area, whether tools are involved or not.

All these safeguards are needed, in addition to a vigorous screening and classification process to clear all inmates who will participate in the program. Nothing is fail-safe, but these steps should result in a safe, secure, work environment.

In 10 years of experience in Hampden County, we have had no incidents of aggression in which tools were used as weapons, nor have there been any incidents against industry staff. There have been a few verbal exchanges between inmates, which resulted in disciplinary action or their termination from the program, but no major incidents have occurred.

Inmate Injuries

Another common concern is what will happen if an inmate is injured while working in an industry program. In terms of minor injuries, this is easy to answer. The institution is responsible for the care and custody of any inmate while he is incarcerated, and this responsibility continues in the industry work place. Therefore, it is imperative that the inmate be trained and instructed in proper shop safety and not be negligently exposed to any unsafe conditions.

In addition to providing proper training, staff must monitor and enforce good safety practices. They must also document the training provided on the various shop tools and equipment used by the inmates.

Small nicks and scrapes are a fact of life and can usually be handled in the shop with Band-Aids, but care should be taken to ensure that all larger injuries are acknowledged, treated, and documented. It is unlikely that you will ever have to deal with a major injury. However, in the unfortunate case that such an injury does happen, documentation will be extremely important because the outcome is quite likely to be determined in court.

During the 10 years of our program's existence, we have had no major inmate injuries. There have been some cases of a stapled finger, objects dropped on a foot, and minor cuts from sharp tools, all of which were treated within our facility. Some injuries also required a precautionary tetanus shot.

My guess is that there are usually more "sports-related" inmate injuries within an institution than "work-related" ones. However, accidents do happen and should be anticipated. A well-planned program must include procedures for documenting and treating injuries as well as ongoing efforts to prevent them.

Problems with Area Businesses

Your institution does not exist in a vacuum, and its administrator may be an elected official who is acutely aware of the concerns of the community. You have an obligation to respect these concerns and to deal fairly with your community.

Every action should be taken only after considering its possible impact on the surrounding community. In determining your jail industry products and services, you should look for niche markets that will have a minimum impact on outside businesses.

Again, the problem is often fear of the unknown. Unless they understand what you do and what your policies are, the people of the community may be concerned that you are taking away jobs from private citizens. It is up to you to make sure they are properly informed. Invite them in, ask them to serve on your advisory board, and consult them before you even begin a program.

Although we have not had any problems with local businesses, Hampden

County Sheriff Michael Ashe and I have been invited to attend meetings with local labor unions to respond to their concerns and to update them on new developments.

Organized labor was represented on our initial advisory board, but the board changed over the years, resulting in a period when we had no labor representation. Union representatives were subsequently invited to join, and they currently serve on our advisory board. We are attuned to our community and act accordingly.

There are many other factors to consider before starting an industry program, but my intent in this brief article has been to address some of the most crucial ones. If you have been considering an industry program in your facility,

I would encourage you to take advantage of the many resources available to you and go for it.

Easy? No. Attainable? Yes. With hard work, the right staff, a certain amount of risk, and the proper entrepreneurial spirit, it can be done.

For more information, contact Joseph Trevathan, Director of Correctional Industries, York Street Industries, Hampden County Correctional Center; telephone (413) 547-8349. ■

Sources for Additional Information

- Jail Industries Association, c/o American Jail Association; (301) 790-3930.
- Correctional Industries Association, Bureau of Justice Assistance PIE Clearinghouse; (410) 465-1838.
- BJA Jail Work and Industry Center, CRS, Inc. (grantee); (301) 977-9090.
- National Institute of Corrections Information Center; (800) 877-1461.
- Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) Coordinator, Correctional Industries Association; (215) 242-9520.
- Bureau of Justice Assistance; (202) 514-6236.
- National Institute of Justice; (202) 514-6205. ■